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ABSTRACT

Arguing that little research has been done on media portrayals of persons with disabilities, this paper reviews mass communication content studies of media portrayal of women and blacks in terms of deviance and minority group theories, and also reviews studies of media treatment of persons with disabilities from the rehabilitation and education literature. The review reveals that few content studies of these groups are theoretically based. Most answer research questions or test hypotheses which are quasi-theoretical or based on no explicit theory at all; in addition, virtually none of the studies of media portrayals of persons with disabilities comes from researchers in the field of mass communication. The paper concludes with an agenda for research of media portrayal of persons with disabilities based on the theoretical models presented. (Nine pages of references are attached.) (Author/RS)

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A Theoretical Framework for Studying Media Portrayal of Persons With Disabilities

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Abstract

While mass communication researchers have studied media treatment of women, blacks and other minorities, little research has been done on media portrayals of persons with disabilities. Most theoretically-based content research on non-majority groups comes from social psychology theories of deviance or from more politically-oriented minority group theory. Three models of perceptions of disability -- medical, social pathology and minority/civil rights -- roughly parallel the theories of deviance and minority groups.

The paper reviews mass communication content studies of media portrayal of women and blacks in terms of deviance and minority group theories. Studies of media treatment of persons with disabilities from the rehabilitation and education literature are also reviewed. The review reveals that few content studies of these groups are theoretically based. Most answer research questions or test hypotheses which are quasi-theoretical or based on no explicit theory at all. Virtually none of the studies of media portrayals of persons with disabilities comes from researchers infield of mass communication.

The paper concludes with an agenda for research of media portrayal of persons with disabilities based on the theoretical models presented.

A Theoretical Framework for Studying Media Portrayal of Persons With Disabilities

INTRODUCTION

In a democratic society, equal opportunity to participate in all facets of that society should be a goal of government and of private and public institutions. In a democracy the majority rule and one of the duties of the majority is to recognize the rights of those who are not in the majority.

In the past 30 years, the United States has begun to recognize that its citizenry extends beyond white males of Western European origin. Racial minorities such as blacks, Hispanics and Asians, and the (non-numerical) minority of women have started to gain recognition, understanding, acceptance and positions of power in the public and private institutions of the United States.

But a smaller more diverse minority still struggles for recognition of their problems and acceptance in society. The group, known as persons with disabilities or the disabled* includes (but is not limited to) those with visual handicaps (including the blind and partially sighted), hearing disabilities (the deaf and partially hearing) and mobility characteristics (wheelchair, crutch and cane users). It is estimated that persons with disabilities make up 20 percent of the U.S. population (Kleinfeld, 1979). Because of economic, physical, architectural and attitudinal barriers, inclusion of these individuals has lagged behind that of racial minorities and women.

The mass media influence the visibility of minorities and can have some impact on the broad social recognition of the problems of these groups. Lazersfeld and Merton (1957) wrote that the media confer status on those whom

*In light of the fact that no one term is acceptable to all members of this diverse group, the terms "persons with disabilities" and "persons with handicaps" will be used throughout this paper. The author recognizes that these terms may offend some, but has decided to use these to avoid confusion and enhance communication.

they choose to cover. "If you really matter, you willbe at the focus of mass attention, and if you are at the focus of mass attention, then you must be important." (pp. 461-62)

The problems of acceptance, equal opportunity, access and employment for persons with disabilities in the 1980s are no less pressing than the situation of blacks in the 1960s (Stroman, 1982). These individuals remain ignored, or at least misunderstood, partly because of the lack of accurate portrayal in the media (Liebert, 1975; Hespenheide, 1988).

Much has been written about how the public views individuals with disabilities. The social psychology and rehabilitation literature are rich with such studies. But the mass communication literature has virtually ignored this issue. The mass communication literature does, however, include a number of studies on the depiction of women and racial minorities in the media which point to theoretical linkage with the social psychology and rehabilitation literature paradigms on persons with handicaps. This paper will review those studies which have dealt with media coverage of persons with disabilities and mass communication studies regarding coverage of women and blacks.

The major goal of this paper is to set a research agenda for study of mass media coverage of disability issues that uses different theoretical perspectives in order to better understand the problems of access, equal opportunity and employment as they affect persons with disabilities.

DEVIANCE VS. MINORITY GROUP THEORY

Two perspectives which have been applied to the study of persons with disabilities and others not in the power centers of society are deviance and minority group theory. Although these perspectives come from different roots, Stroman (1982) noted that in the past 20 years, sociologists have studied some groups (including persons with handicaps) from both the deviance and minority group viewpoints.

Deviance theory is grounded in social psychology and is related to the theory of roles. Roles have been defined as "the sets of expectations, rights, obligations, and patterns of predictable behaviors that persons employ when occupying particular positions." (Babad, Birnbaum & Benne, 1983, p. 211) Parsons (1951) defined deviance as behavior which fails "to fulfill the institutionally defined expectations of one or more of the roles in which the individual is implicated in the society." (p. 452) Other social psychologists have arrived at variations on this definition, resulting in different types of and explanations for deviance.

A fairly simple conception of deviance is a departure or variation from the average standards of society (Becker, 1963). This statistical conceptualization attaches no value to deviance and can include characteristics ranging from left-handedness to tallness.

Another type of deviance, normative deviance, emphasises behavior or non-behavioral characteristics which violate social norms or group rules (Becker, 1963). A concept closely tied to normative deviance is stigma. Goffman (1963) noted that stigmatized persons are those who possess an attribute which is considered discrediting and these individuals are considered less than fully human because of it. Stafford and Scott (1987) defined stigma as "a characteristic of persons that is contrary to a norm of a social unit." (p. 80) They equated stigma with deviance and added that it can consist of behavioral norm violations (such as premarital sex where chastity is prized) and non-behavioral deviations (old age in a youth oriented culture or paraplegia where physical mobility is emphasized).

Another aspect or definition of deviance comes out of labeling theory. Labeling theorists maintain that a person is deviant partly because norms are broken and partly because someone else calls him or her deviant because of it (Becker, 1963). Labeling can have a major impact on whom in society is

stigmatized as deviant. As Becker and Arnold (1987) noted, "[Deviance] is largely determined by the way the community interprets and codes the many details of behavior that come to its attention." (p. 47)

Minority group theory, while also studying those outside of the powerful mainstreams of society, has concentrated on individuals with racial or ethnic distinctions. Dworkin and Dworkin (1982) wrote that minority groups are characterized by four qualities: identifiability, differential power, differential pejorative treatment and group awareness.

Stroman (1982) noted that deviance theorists study groups and individuals with behavioral and physical distinctions, while minority group theorists focus on physical and cultural differences. Minority groups are identified by characteristics such as skin color, sex or physical handicap; and by cultural factors such as dress, customs and language.

Persons with disabilities qualify as a minority group in at least three of the four criterion qualities listed by Dworkin and Dworkin (1982). With a few exceptions (for example individuals with "invisible" disabilities such as dyslexia and some learning disorders), they are identifiable by the very characteristics which make them disabled. Facial disfigurement, prosthetic mobility aids, wheelchairs and leader dogs all identify a person's disability.

Persons with disabilities also have differential power. Stroman (1982) noted that this is the case in terms of numerical size of the group, property holdings, income level, years of education and political offices held. Another factor, noted by Gliedman and Roth (1980) is that when persons with disabilities do attain power, their disability may become "invisible" as this conflicts with the stereotypical image of such people as helpless and dependent. (They list examples such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Beethoven, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Sigmund Freud. "We remember FDR's cigarette holder better than his wheelchair." [p. 29])

Those with disabilities must also deal with differential and pejorative treatment. Aside from obvious barriers to physical access and communication imposed by society, persons with handicaps tend to suffer educational, vocational and attitudinal discrimination (Tenny, 1953).

Dworkin and Dworkin's (1982) fourth quality--group awareness--is not as highly developed with persons with disabilities as with other minorities. In 1953, Tenny noted that they did not create social crisis threats. Part of this could be explained by the fact that the disability is not usually shared by the individual's family. But political activity by individuals with handicaps throughout the country since 1970 has begun to establish a sense of solidarity among individuals with various disabilities (Ablon, 1980; Anspach, 1979; Haskins, 1976; Johnson, 1988; Krossel, 1988).

The focus of minority group theory is on the need of society in general to accommodate members of different groups. These political ramifications are also evident in the civil rights movement (need for white society to open up to and share power with blacks) and the feminist movement (need of male dominated society to share power with women and to accept feminist values). Deviance theorists on the other hand, focus on ways to either change or control the deviant who represents a threat to society. It is this second approach which has most often been applied to physically disabled people.

THREE MODELS OF DISABILITY

A theoretical paradigm which springs from these two approaches to individuals with handicaps has been developed by researchers in the fields of special education disability policy studies. Gliedman and Roth (1980) and Hahn (1985) outlined three theoretical models of ways society views people with disabilities.

One model, based on medical criteria, emphasizes an individual's physical functioning and may be the most common conception.

Another perspective, the social pathology viewpoint, is the basis for many government assistance programs and emphasizes the perceived inability of persons with disabilities to support themselves economically in society.

The third model rejects the assumptions of the first two -- that a person with limitations cannot function physically, mentally or economically. This minority/civil rights perspective views the person with a handicap as a member of a group which is oppressed by the physical and attitudinal barriers of a society which is prejudiced in favor of the needs of the non-disabled majority.

Probably the most prevalent conception society has of those with disabilities is the medical or disease model. This stems from what Parsons has called the "sick role" as a form of deviant behavior (Parsons, 1951). Parsons noted that this role entails the individual's exemption from normal social obligations and from responsibility for his or her condition.

The medical model views disability as an aberration from the "healthy" norm. The focus is on prescription and treatment of the individual, who is expected to give up autonomy to a health professional and to a medical support network. This model puts the focus of the problem on the individual's disability as a sickness which must either be cured or contained. No "blame" is put on any aspect of society.

The consequences of this mode of thinking for the individual with a disability can be passivity, gains (if any) limited to individual physical recovery or maintenance, and severe limits on if not outright suspension of social activities.

The second model is based on many of the assumptions present in the medical outlook. Whereas in the medical model the disability is thought of as a disease and the individual becomes the patient under the care of a medical "expert;" in the social pathology model, the role of the individual with a handicap is that of a stigmatized individual or "deviant" who is considered out of step with the

rest of society. Again, the individual is labeled as inferior, this time as a "disadvantaged" client who must look to society for economic support.

Unlike the medical model, blame for the disabling aspects of the individual is apportioned between the person with a handicap, who cannot perform many types of jobs and activities in society, and the social environment itself, whose free market economy is unable to accommodate the individual's employment and other needs.

The ramifications of this model, however, are only slightly different from those of the medical model. Specifically, Bogdan and Biklin (1977) note that a cornerstone of the support system for persons with disabilities is that the service provided is a gift or privilege, not a right. Such support "demeans its recipients by supporting the prejudice that the handicapped are inferior people." (p. 23)

They also postulated that the other major source of social services to the handicapped, governmental agencies, tend, in the interest of bureaucratic efficiency, to herd, label, and further stigmatize those individuals with various disabilities.

Both the medical and social pathology attitudes result in what Bogdan and Bicklen (1977) refer to as "handicapism" -- promotion of differential or unequal treatment of individuals because of physical, mental or behavioral differences. Handicapism is considered equivalent to racism and sexism in that able-bodied individuals tend to avoid contact with and also stigmatize persons with handicaps. They add that at the societal level, these individuals are portrayed stereotypically by the media, are held back by physical as well as well as attitudinal barriers and are encouraged to be docile in order to receive support services from the government.

The third model, the minority/civil rights perspective, is explicitly politically-based. It puts the blame for disabling aspects of a handicap not on

the individual who cannot walk, see or hear, but on the inability of society to adjust to the specific needs of these individuals (Hahn, 1985).

The idea of persons with disabilities as a minority group was advanced by Tenny (1953) when he proposed focusing on "the limitations imposed by society upon handicapped individuals and groups." Bowe (1978) noted that disabled Americans have suffered more economically than other minority groups, with the highest rates of unemployment, poverty and welfare dependency in the United States. They have also been segregated from the rest of society in housing, education, transportation and public accommodation.

Gliedman and Roth (1980) assert that able-bodied people blame these economic and social problems on the physical limitations of disabled persons, not on social oppression. The authors compared this to the racist or sexist who accounts for lack of economic success by blacks or women by attributing it to racial or sexual inferiority rather than to years of systematic discrimination in society.

A consequence of the minority/civil rights model is that those with disabilities expect and demand that society view them as equals and respect their opinions and input in all areas of society. The ultimate goal is to achieve a physical and societal environment useable by and accommodating to all. This goal could be considered a fourth cultural pluralism model where society would take no more notice of characteristics such as physical handicap, race or gender than is taken now of eye color or earlobe length.

The goals of the minority/civil rights model are similar to the focus of minority group theory. Both concentrate on the need of society in general to accommodate members of different groups. The medical and social pathology models, like deviance theory, focus on the differences between individuals and society. The traditional definition of the deviant as being a flawed individual coincides with the medical model. The social pathology model also concentrates

on the individual's differentness and seeks to solve problems caused by this differentness by funneling resources (charity, government aid, etc.) to allow persons with handicaps to survive in an arena separate from (and most likely unequal to) the rest of society.

STUDIES OF MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF MINORITIES

Media content studies of groups considered to be different have, in the past 20 years, tended to focus on blacks and women, with some other groups such as the elderly and mentally and physically disabled receiving some attention. Studies of the last group, for the most part, have been conducted by rehabilitation and special education researchers rather than by mass communication scholars. With the exception of a few studies based in deviance concepts and minority group theory, these examinations of media portrayal of non-mainstream groups have not been grounded on explicit theoretical bases, but have sought answers to non-theoretically based questions or been based on previous research which itself had tenuous ties to formal theory. No media studies have used three models of perceptions of disability.

An exception to this atheoretical trend in mass media studies is Shoemaker's (1985) comparison of various conceptions of the deviance construct with accepted definitions of newsworthiness. She postulated that most definitions of deviance (including statistical, normative and labeling) are incorporated to varying degrees in newsworthiness criteria such as novelty, conflict, sensationalism and prominence (p. 17). In such routine coverage areas as public meetings, elections and obituaries, Shoemaker noted that an event's degree of deviance will affect the prominence of placement in the newspaper, magazine or newscast: "Deviant events make up much of the news content for any given day. In addition, the more deviant a person or event is, the more prominently he/it will be covered and the more space (or time) will be

allocated." (p. 20) Shoemaker (1984) found evidence that media coverage of political groups differed depending on how deviant a group was considered to be.

This newsworthiness-deviance labeling could explain, to varying degrees, patterns of media portrayal of non-mainstream groups such as blacks, women and those with disabilities. A group which is considered worthy of media attention primarily because of its deviance from mainstream society may be more distant from full acceptance into society than a group whose distinguishing characteristics are no longer considered the most important aspect of its members. In other words, the kind of media attention a group receives--not merely the presence of that group in the news--may indicate how accepted that group is. Such coverage may also influence the group's ultimate acceptance into mainstream society.

Although most studies of media portrayal of blacks, women and other groups have not been grounded in social psychological theory as explicitly as Shoemaker's, these content studies have, for the most part, concluded that the media portray blacks, women and other groups in ways different from and more pejorative than portrayals of mainstream groups. Poindexter and Stroman (1981), for instance, noted that television portrayals of blacks showed a history of underrepresentation with later trends toward increased visibility. But they also found a tendency to portray blacks stereotypically and with negative connotations. These qualities could also be said to apply to portrayals of women and other groups, in print and advertising as well as in television entertainment programs.

The following review of media content studies examines depictions of blacks, women and those with disabilities. For each group, those studies which test an explicit theory are reviewed first, followed by those which seek to answer research questions with at least a mention of a theoretical basis. These are followed by studies which are primarily atheoretical.

Studies of Media Portrayals of Blacks

Most of the content studies of media portrayals of blacks were not explicitly theoretically based. Those theoretical studies primarily took social psychological tenets as bases, although some were grounded in political or minority group theory. The majority of black portrayal studies were quasi-theoretical, making passing reference to concepts related to theories of deviance, labeling, stereotypes and roles.

Theoretically-based studies

Studies of media portrayals of blacks from a deviance perspective have tended to be related to another area of deviance study--crime. In a case study of crime news, Rudwick (1962) noted that newspaper labeling of black suspects and offenders caused readers to believe blacks had a higher crime rate than whites. He added that race labeling confirmed racial stereotypes and inflamed public opinion against blacks (p. 178).

Other studies of racial identification also were based on this deviance or labeling principle. Dulaney (1965) studied 1642 crime stories and found 10 cases of racial identification of blacks and none of whites or other ethnic groups. Baran (1973) found no significant differences in newspaper coverage of white student deaths at Kent State and black deaths at Jackson State and Southern University in 1970. However, Pritchard (1985) found that a homicide victim's race affected the fairness and completeness of newspaper coverage.

The role (invisible or nonexistent) of blacks was studied by Johnson, Sears and McConahay (1971). They found Los Angeles newspaper coverage of blacks was actually diminishing prior to the 1965 Watts uprising (p. 698). This was immediately followed by an increase in coverage during and immediately after the disturbances (a deviant, therefore newsworthy event), followed by a return to

pre-riot coverage levels. They noted that post-riot coverage had less focus on stereotypical activities and more emphasis on interracial conflict (another example of Shoemaker's deviance equals newsworthiness).

Although the civil rights movement had political as well as social implications, only a few studies of black portrayals tested explicit politically-based theories. Pride and Clark's (1973) study of television network news was based on the political science concept of authorities' (government and media) meeting the expectations of minority groups. They found there was no systematic denigration of either side in network coverage of black white conflict, but that both black militants and white racists were treated uniformly negatively.

A content study by Martindale (1985) evaluated newspaper coverage of African Americans from both a deviance and a minority rights perspective. Stories were evaluated as to whether blacks were considered from a deviant (stereotypical), non-deviant (everyday life) or minority rights (civil rights-related, minority life) perspective. Martindale found increases in daily life and civil rights-related coverage, but a continued paucity of stories of minority concern during the time period covered.

Quasi-theoretically based studies

In a study of white newspapers in Texas in 1932, Bryant (1935) found negative stereotypes of blacks in both the urban and rural press in 1912 and 1932. He found no real differences, although he noted that the newspapers of twenty years later no longer used blatantly derogatory labels such as "darky" and "senegambians" in headlines.

In a study with a quasi-theoretical base in the principles of deviance, Gist (1932) found a tendency in white newspapers around the U.S. to minimize all types of black news to levels below amounts representative of the population.

He also found that, contrary to Shoemaker's deviance/newsworthiness paridigm, more space was devoted to routine news of blacks than to anti-social or criminal activities involving African Americans.

Studies of pictorial treatment of blacks in magazines came from a variety of quasi-theoretical perspectives. Greenberg and Kahn (1970), who found an increase in the numbers of blacks in Playboy cartoons from 1956-1969, based their analysis on "social critics [who] have argued that assimilation into the main paths of society is indexed in part by an increasing tolerance of humor directed at that minority." (p. 557). White's (1979) study of blacks and Native Americans in Playboy cartoons was similarly based, but also included elements of cultural anthropology in its analysis of the depiction of facial features and artifacts.

Quasi-theoretical television content studies of blacks which can be said to have come from a social psychology perspective looked at the roles played by blacks on evening newscasts (Roberts, 1975) and in entertainment programs (Hinton, Seggar, Northcott & Fontes, 1974; Northcott, Seggar & Hinton, 1975; O'Kelley & Bloomquist, 1976). These generally noted increases in the numbers of blacks on television, but noted that the roles they played were, by and large, stereotypical.

The racial unrest of the 1960s brought charges from the Kerner Commission on Civil Disorder that blacks were invisible in the American mass media (Kerner, 1968). Despite the political nature of the unrest and of the civil rights movement in general, most studies which approached media portrayal of blacks from a political/minority rights perspective did so without formal theoretical base.

Broom and Reece (1955) examined newspaper coverage of a trial involving political and racial unrest with consideration given to the political commitment of the accused. Stempel (1971) examined coverage of blacks by pre- and post-

Kerner news stories. Poindexter and Stroman (1981) noted an increase in black visibility on television news following the Kerner report. Hinton, et al., (1974) and Seggar, Hafen and Hannonen-Gladden, (1981) also considered minority rights as a basis for their studies of television drama and comedy.

A series of studies of magazine advertising content examined occupational roles played by blacks (Shuey, King & Griffith, 1953; Cox, 1970; Colfax & Sternberg, 1972; Humphrey & Schuman, 1984; Zinkhan, Cox & Hong, 1986). These studies indicated that while the numbers of blacks in magazine ads increased, their consignment to lower or stereotypical roles was slow to change (Culley and Bennett, 1976).

Atheoretical studies

A number of the studies of media portrayal of blacks were atheoretical examinations. Colle's (1968) descriptive account of blacks in the mass media had no theoretical underpinnings beyond the notion of social change being reflected in the mass media. Atheoretical print studies simply looked at amount of coverage (Baran, 1973), amount and placement in the newspaper (Chaudhary, 1980), or amount and fairness (Kelley, 1976; Poindexter & Stroman, 1980; Washburn, 1981). Studies of television content noted low numbers of blacks and their prominence in programs (Dominick & Greenberg, 1970) and in commercials (Bush, Solomon & Hair, 1977). Another atheoretically based study counted a low number of blacks appearing in introductory magazine ads (Reid & Vanden Bergh, 1980).

Studies of Media Portrayals of Women

Like studies of media portrayal of blacks, few examinations of portrayal of women test explicitly described theories. Most nod in the direction of some theoretical concept and others are simply tallies of gender differences.

Theoretically-based studies

Social psychologists Babad, Birnbaum and Benne (1983) explained gender-related theories as a continuum. At one end is the concept of sex roles, defined as "socially and culturally defined expectations that men and women are expected to fill." (p. 165) Further along the continuum are the politically-based concepts of sexism, or the prejudicial attitude which views women as inferior, and feminism, the political movement with the goal of freeing both sexes from the tradition of females being considered inferior and being subjugated by males. (p. 166)

Many studies explicitly testing sex role theory examined women's roles as portrayed in advertising. These included Goffman's (1979) examination of pictorial print advertising, which he noted reinforced the gender divisions and hierarchies of traditional social structures. Mamay and Simpson (1982) found women played three roles in television commercials--mother, housekeeper and object of beauty (p. 1231). In a look at the opposite side, Skelly and Lundstrom (1981) found a decrease in male sex role stereotypes in magazine advertisements from 1959 to 1979.

A number of examinations of media directed at children cited theories of learning along with sex role theory. Brabent (1974) noted the established importance of learned association via the media in the development of sex-role socialization in children. Her research (Brabent, 1974; Brabent & Mooney, 1986) found traditional sex roles were perpetuated in the Sunday comics. Other studies which utilized social learning theory found traditional sex roles portrayed in children's television programs (O'Kelly, 1974), cartoons (Mayes & Valentine, 1974) and television toy commercials (Macklin & Kolbe, 1984; Schwartz & Markham, 1985).

A few studies tested explicitly feminist or politically-based theories. Chavez (1985) combined a social learning perspective with the neo-Marxist view that male dominated society perpetuates and reinforces gender inequality in young people through the depiction of male dominance in daily newspaper comic strips. Newkirk (1977) tested a conflict theory-based hypothesis, and found that publishers of traditional women's magazines selectively incorporated feminist views into their power structure, keeping magazine content changes gradual and to a minimum, thereby maintaining their original power structure. Blum's (1982) case study of a television adaptation of The Women's Room concluded that network executives changed the novel's feminist themes to the liberal concepts of freedom of choice within structured limits.

In an essay on feminist attacks on the use of language by journalists and others, Ward (1975) cited feminist theories stressing the power of language "to hold the mind in captivity, predetermining through its lexicon and its structure, certain key social and cultural outlooks." (p. 705)

Quasi-theoretical studies

A number of studies were based on quasi-theoretical notions of sex roles. These generally concluded that women were tied to or associated with traditional roles in general news and crime stories (Foreit, et al., 1980; Matre, 1975), sports coverage (Reid & Soley, 1978) and advice columns (Smith & Levin, 1974). Quasi-theoretical role-based studies of comics (Palmer, 1979) and news photographs (Blackwood, 1983; Miller, 1975;) yielded similar results.

Studies making passing reference to women's roles in television programs found stereotypically traditional portrayals dominated children's programs (Busby, 1974), cartoons (Streicher, 1974), family shows (Long & Simon, 1974), prime time programs (Turow, 1974; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977; Dominick, 1979) and even programming on public broadcasting (Matelski, 1984).

Studies of advertising with a quasi-theoretical sex role basis included Verna (1975), who found sex roles to be shown traditionally in children's television commercials, while Welch, et al. (1979) noted subtle sex role differences in production techniques used to advertise toys for boys and girls. Other studies (Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Culley & Bennett, 1976; Dominick & Rauch, 1972; O'Donnell & O'Donnell, 1978; O'Kelly & Bloomquist, 1976; Warren, 1978) found television commercials portrayed women in traditional roles.

Quasi-theoretical content studies of portrayal of women in the media based on feminism also dealt with roles. One such analysis of newspaper content (Morris, 1973) concluded that British and American newspapers witheld information about the emerging women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a form of social control. Davis (1982) found newspaper coverage of women corresponded to feminists' charges of sexist bias and stereotyping. Silver (1986), however, found feminist charges that the press ignored or trivialized women were not substantiated in coverage of male and female public officials when controlling for occupation and seniority of the officials.

Quasi-theoretical studies of women's pages (Guenin, 1975; Miller, 1976) found that despite much insistence from the media that newspapers were changing these pages in response to feminist criticisms, the subject matter still tended to reinforce traditional stereotypes. Other research results supported feminist contentions that women were subjugated by portrayals in non-fiction magazine articles (Farley, 1978), erotic magazines (Malamuth & Spinner, 1980) and Playboy cartoons (Matacin & Burger, 1987).

Television studies based on a feminist perspective with quasi-theoretical underpinnings contained findings that depictions were extremely sexist (McNeill, 1975) to somewhat sexist but gradually improving (Seggar, 1975, 1977; Seggar et al., 1981; Seggar & Wheeler, 1973). Stocking, Sapolsky and Zillman (1977) found male domination of women was manifested in prime time humor, while Serra and

Kallan (1983) found P.M. Magazine to be a bastion of sexual egalitarianism. Advertising studies also detected subjugation of women in magazine (Poe, 1976) and television advertisements (Maracek, et al., 1978; Venkatesan and Losco, 1975).

Atheoretical studies

Studies with no theoretical perspective looked simply at gender differences in portrayals in television news assignments (Singleton & Cook, 1982), soap operas (Downing, 1974), prime time television (Lemon, 1977), political advertisements (Benze & Declerq, 1985) and television product commercials (Knill et al., 1981). The general conclusions of these studies were that there were differences in portrayal of males and females, but attributed this to neither traditional nor progressive influences.

Studies of Media Portrayal of Persons with Physical Disabilities

Most of the content studies of media depiction of those with physical disabilities are without a formal theoretical basis. A majority of these come from rehabilitation literature. Like the studies reviewed of the other groups, some mention a theoretical idea. Others are atheoretical tallies or qualitative comments on media depiction of persons with disabilities.

The general trend of depiction of persons with physical handicaps was summed up by Gerbner, et al. (1981), who noted that on television, "Physically handicapped characters are few and tend to be older, less positively presented, and more likely to be victimized." (p. 902)

Theoretically based studies

In an analysis of television programming from a role theory perspective, Donaldson (1981) examined both visibility and the image portrayed by handicapped

characters in 1979. Image categories were derived from role models developed by Wolfensberger (1972) and Biklen and Bogdan (1976). Donaldson found the images portrayed were generally negative or stereotypically positive (e.g. valiant individuals who successfully overcame handicaps) "Absent were positive portrayals of handicapped persons in roles in which their disability is secondary." (p.414)

Leonard's (1978) examination of portrayals on television was based on Bogdan and Biklen's (1977) concept of handicapism (equivalent to racism and sexism). She found that network television drama reflected a discriminatory view of persons with handicaps. In addition to finding low numbers of these invividuals portrayed on the screen, Leonard noted that persons with disabilities were more likely to be shown as excluded from desireable groups; two-thirds were depicted as being taken care of and three-fourths were shown as submissive. She found that in terms of physical and personality traits, persons with disabilities were portrayed as uncultured, stupid, dependent, impatient and sloppy in dress. (p. xiii)

Liebert (1975) noted that positive and negative attitudes toward disability are related to observational learning (which includes watching television). Although this theory was used as a basis for an analysis of television and disability (Dillon, Byrd & Byrd, 1980; Elliott & Byrd, 1982) their conclusion that use of the media (particularly video technology) can be effective in breaking down stereotypes was based on other effects research (Donaldson & Martinson, 1977; Sadlick & Penta, 1975) and not on their content analysis.

An historical-literary approach to disability and monstrosity was used in studies of reactions to persons with disabilities (Kent, 1987; Thurer, 1980; Park & Danston, 1981). Livneh (1980) outlined a number of psychological theories which could explain the tendencies to negatively label persons with disabilities in literature.

Quasi-theoretically based studies

Studies which noted but did not explicitly test stigma and deviance theory found stigmatized roles in literature (Kriegel, 1987), children's comic books (Weinberg & Santana, 1978) and television (Elliott, 1983).

A number of quasi-theoretical qualitative pieces in the rehabilitation literature made passing reference to the ideas contained in minority group theory or Gliedman and Roth's (1980) minority/civil rights model. These noted the lack of accurate portrayal of persons with disabilities in newspapers (Biklen, 1987), television (Byrd, 1979; Longmore, 1987), and the mass media in general (Ruffner, 1987; Thompson, 1980).

Atheoretical studies

Studies which were not theoretically based include an early qualitative study of literature (Langworthy, 1930) which evaluated blind characters in fiction in terms of how accurate and how helpful these portrayals would be to blind persons trying to make it in a sighted society. A more recent albeit atheoretical analysis of literature (Byrd, Williamson & Byrd, 1986) counted disabled characters in literature and found an increase from 1550 to 1950. Other primarily quantitative studies found low numbers of persons with physical disabilities in feature films (Byrd & Pipes, 1981) and television programs (Byrd, Byrd & Allen, 1977).

Summary of Media Content Studies

Media content studies of blacks, women and others have tended to approach the topic from either a social psychological perspective (deviance, labeling, role or sex role theory) or from a political viewpoint (minority group, civil rights perspective). There has also been a tendency to evaluate portrayal

bipolarly (positive - negative, progressive-traditional, stereotypical-realistic). Studies of blacks and women have measured these concepts by evaluating descriptive language and depiction in news stories and photos; roles and prominence in television entertainment programs; and roles and relationship to others in television commercials and print advertising.

Many studies of blacks focused on the number depicted. In these cases, invisibility is considered negative and visibility positive. In studies of women, the quality of the portrayal (or the quantity of women shown in certain positive roles) has been the major concern. This is not to say that studies of blacks and others have ignored the quality of portrayal, but invisibility has not been as great a concern for women.

Systematic studies of media content portrayal of persons with disabilities have not gone very far beyond the head-counting stage. Although many literary and anecdotal pieces have evaluated the content as either progressive or traditional, few quantitative studies of media depiction of persons with physical handicaps have included systematic evaluations of the depictions which were counted or have proceeded from a theoretical base.

A FRAMEWORK FOR MEDIA RESEARCH

A review of studies of media portrayal of blacks, women and other groups reveals that fewer than one quarter of them were solidly based in theory, and that only half of those theoretically based studies can be considered part of the mass communication literature. The other half of those theoretical studies appeared in sociological, rehabilitation and feminist journals.

None of the studies of media portrayal of persons with disabilities appeared in mass communication journals. Additionally, few of those content studies proceeded from a theoretical base, and none were based on Gliedman and

Roth's (1980) three models. Clearly, theoretically-based study of media portrayal of persons with disabilities is an area thus far largely untouched by mass communication researchers.

Still, the theoretical perspectives reviewed above provide the basis for theoretically grounded inquiries into media portrayal of persons with disabilities. These theories; normative deviance, labeling and stigma, the medical and social pathology models of disability, minority group theory and the minority/civil rights model of disability; will now be briefly summarized with suggestions for applications to mass media studies.

Normative deviance theory holds that persons with non-behavioral characteristics (eg. a physical or mental disability) which violate social norms (such as a high value on personal fitness and physical mobility) will be stigmatized (considered less than fully human) by society. Mass media researchers might then ask if portrayals of handicapped individuals in news and entertainment fare are consistent with this perspective. For example, does news coverage focus on the triumphs of an individual who "overcomes" an explicitly emphasized disability to perform some feat while implying that those with disabilities who don't perform such feats are less than fully human? Do television entertainment programs portray persons with disabilities as unable to function in ways not related to their disability? The above studies based on normative deviance and stigma theory would predict that if predominant social attitudes determine media portrayals, individuals with disabilities would be portrayed in ways tied to their disability, or would be covered primarily as human interest feature subjects.

Labeling theorists hold that an individual is stigmatized when he or she is called deviant. In this instance, researchers could view mass media portrayal of persons with disabilities as an independent variable (the labeler) or as a dependent variable (reflecting society's designation of a person with a

disability as a deviant). For example, does news copy refer to persons with disabilities using terms which emphasise their difference from "normal" members of society? Do visual portrayals in news, television entertainment and advertising do the same? Labeling theory would predict that the media reflect society by labeling persons with handicaps as deviants, and that the media also play a role in the labeling process.

Gliedman and Roth's (1980) medical model of disabliity, which is based in deviance theory, including Parsons' (1951) concept of the sick role, holds that a person is defined as "sick" when he or she has a disability. The individual becomes a patient who is expected to give up autonomy for the care of medical experts. Media researchers could investigate whether portrayals are consistent with this model. For example, does news coverage focus on medical aspects of disability or on medical developments which could make persons with disabilities more "normal"? Are characters with disabilities in entertainment programs shown only as patients or are portrayals focused solely on their disability? Are they portrayed as docile, dependent on doctors and hoping for a cure? Do advertisers avoid portrayal of persons with disabilities beause of the negative and deviant ramifications of their "sickness"? The medical model would predict that these individuals would appear most often in some variation of the sick role in both news coverage and entertainment programming, and would be invisible in advertisements.

The social pathology model of disability, also drawn from deviance concepts, views the disabled individual as a disadvantaged client, dependent on society for economic support. Researchers could look at whether news coverage of persons with disabilities focuses on government welfare or private charity programs to help them. Do telethons and fundraising programs portray these individuals as objects of pity, who need help from monetary donations? Do disabled characters reflect this role of the recipient of help, or of the

economically needy individual who is in that state because of his or her disability. The social pathology model would predict that disabled individuals would be portrayed as economically disadvantaged and in need of help and would be more likely to appear in the news as the subject of political debates over social welfare programs.

Minority group theory holds that persons with handicaps are identifiable, have less political power, receive differential pejorative treatment and have group awareness. Researchers could ask if, as in the case with blacks 20 years ago, this identifiable group receives pejorative treatment from the media by being excluded from news stories, entertainment programs and advertising, or by portrayal in stereotypical (possibly reflecting the medical or social pathology models) ways. Does news coverage of persons with disabilities concentrate on the differential power of these individuals as well as their political demands for societal changes which would allow them to take part in everyday life? Minority group theory would predict that news coverage and portrayals of these individuals would reflect these poltical aspects of disability.

The minority/civil rights model of disability, a further specification of minority group theory, holds that persons with handicaps are held back primarily by society's unwillingness to open up physically and attitudinally to this minority group. Researchers might ask whether news coverage focuses on debates over social changes called for by disability rights activists. Are individuals with disabilities portrayed as being held back by society rather than by their disability? Does news copy, entertainment programming dialogue and advertising copy avoid negative language when referring to persons with disabilities as they, for the most part, do now when referring to blacks and women? If the minority/civil rights model is reflected in the media, this would be the case.

Researchers could ask which of these perspectives (deviance, minority group or the three models) predominates in media portrayal of persons with

disabilities and how that has varied over time. Earlier studies of blacks (Martindale, 1985) and the mentally retarded (Bonnstetter, 1986) found that portrayals became less stereotypical and less stigmatized over time. These trends could be investigated for similarities in depiction of persons with disabilities.

There is already anecdotal evidence that the media are beginning to depict persons with disabilities in ways consistent with the minority/civil rights model. Longmore has cited increased presence of persons with handicaps in television commercials (Longmore, 1985; Marjenhoff, 1986) and has noted examples of at least a quasi-minority/civil rights inspired portrayals in entertainment programming (Marjenhoff, 1986; Longmore, 1987). Johnson (1988) described news coverage of the student protests at Gallaudet University in March 1988 as "the kind of coverage the disability-rights movement has longed for. . . . Reporters covered the protest as straight news, with little of the soft human-interest approach that affects too many stories about disability issues." (p. 21)

Persons with disabilities may comprise nearly one fifth of the population of the United States (Kleinfeld, 1979). As the population of the country ages, it is inevitable that more will join this group. Because of the media's power to confer status and to focus attention on minorities (Lazersfeld & Merton, 1957), how the mass media (and mass media researchers) deal with this "hidden" or "unexpected" minority will have important consequences on society's ability to to adapt to and understand the issues of acceptance, equal opportunity, access and employment for persons with disabilities.

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